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NEWS RELEASE

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Health Assessment Finds No Probable Public Health Risks in The Southeastern Idaho Phosphate Resource Area

The Idaho Division of Health has completed a public health assessment for the Southeastern Idaho Phosphate Resource Area, finding no probable public health risks to people living in the area. The assessment is available for public comment through December 16, 2005.

The Southeastern Idaho Phosphate Resource Area is made up of 2,500 square miles of open pit mining sites in Caribou, Bingham, Bannock, and Bear Lake Counties. In the 1990s, horses and sheep pastured in mine areas were diagnosed with diseases associated with selenium poisoning. This prompted concern about potential releases of selenium to the environment from mining activities and the impact on human health.

The study found that people can be exposed to chemicals from the Southeastern Idaho Phosphate Resource Area by eating fish, elk, and beef from the area. However, it is unlikely that anyone would become ill if they follow these recommendations:

- An average-sized man weighing 183 pounds should eat no more than 11 ounces of elk liver per month, while an average-sized woman weighing 143 lbs should eat no more than 9 ounces of elk liver per month; and
- Children under the age of seven should not eat more than four 4-ounce meals per month of Yellowstone Cutthroat and Brook trout from East Mill Creek due to selenium contamination.

(more)

The study found that selenium in beef and elk muscle and beef liver is unlikely to result in any adverse health effects for people eating up to eight ounces every day. The study also found the levels of contamination at the sites are not high enough to result in any cancerous health effects to people living near or recreating at the Southeastern Idaho Phosphate Resource Area.

The Bureau will hold an open house about the assessment on December 15th at the Southeastern Idaho Health District Office in Soda Springs. Staff will be available to answer questions and accept comments on the assessment. The meeting will be held from 6 – 9 pm at 55 East 1st South.

Copies of the public health assessment can be viewed or copied at the public libraries in Montpelier, Soda Springs, Grace and Preston; or the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality Office in Pocatello, and the Selenium Project Office in Fort Hall. Additionally, a free copy can be mailed by contacting the Bureau of Community and Environmental Health at 1-866-240-3533 or emailing bceh@idhw.state.id.us. For additional assistance or questions about the assessment, please contact the Bureau of Community and Environmental Health.

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(Editors: For more information, contact Chris Corwin, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Boise, 1-866-240-3533.)